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KANYBEK KUDAYAROV. ANALYTICAL CENTRES OF THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA*

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Abstract. To date, analytical centres of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), continuing its progressive development, form almost half of the total number of regional “thought factories”. At the same time, quantitative indicators of the KSA are quite correlated with qualitative indicators expressed in the degree of involvement of university academic circles and the number of scientific papers of the expert community. Despite the differences in the publication activity and other indicators, however, in general, the position of the analytical industry in Saudi Arabia has a fairly positive development dynamics.

Introduction

The states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are enjoying rapid economic growth that promotes various fields of activity, primarily innovative projects and modern technologies. However, the development of the analytical industry is also essential for the adequate development of their scientific and intellectual base. To date, there are 16 ‘think tanks’ in Saudi Arabia, almost equalling the total number of analytical centres (AC) in the entire GCC region, which is 22 (excluding Oman). Overall, the UAE has 11 think tanks, Kuwait – 4, Qatar – 5, and Bahrain – 2.

It should be noted that, unlike other states of the Arabian Peninsula, the composition of the expert groups in the analytical centres of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is relatively larger. Another distinctive feature of the Saudi think tanks is their efficiency of providing high quality research and analytics, making the Saudi think tanks superior throughout the GCC countries. They are composed not only of many ‘best minds’ of the Arabian Peninsula, but also of eminent experts from the countries of the West and South-East Asia, who have achieved tremendous success in establishing and promoting high-tech industries and possess a highly developed scientific and academic infrastructure. Many of the KSA’s think tanks are government-controlled organizations with powerful state funding, which to a great extent determines

the number of full-time and freelance experts and scientific developments of the research centres in Saudi Arabia. Being the largest state of the Arabian Peninsula and the GCC, as well as one of the richest countries in the Arab world, Saudi Arabia has a large number of regional and international ACs. This allows for a greater openness to the outside world and, therefore, attracts a greater number of foreign experts, both for research and management purposes, including within the Board of Directors. Experts believe that this has positive effects on building management strategies and their effectiveness.

The rapid development of advanced technologies in various sectors of the economy, as well as in the field of cyber security, environmental and food security and other areas, allows Saudi Arabia to make a breakthrough in its development. Despite the fact that some experts criticize little influence of analytical centres on the state policy in Saudi Arabia, they are still significant for promoting scientific research and boosting efficiency in certain sectors of the state.

This is especially evidenced by the publication activity of analytical centres and their scientific potential.

Nevertheless, without entering into details of the development of think tanks, it would be useful to list think tanks in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and indicate the level of their scientific activity.

This review provides information about 16 analytical centres in Saudi Arabia that cover all the state priority sectors:

1) **Centre for Desert Agriculture (CDA), Desert Agriculture Initiative** is one of the top think tanks in the country that studies, tests and implements sustainable crop production systems. The staff of the organization of over fifty people comprises experts from various countries (USA, EU and China), who work under the guidance of the former director of the Transnational Genomics Research Institute and Clemson University (USA), R.A. Wing. The Centre studies terrestrial ecosystems in order to promote biodiversity conservation and

combat desertification and climate change; explores the possible use of wild and underutilized plants for the development of sustainable farming; as well as studies genome, physiology and development of *Phoenix* (a genus of palm). The primary objective of CDA is to find smart and efficient solutions to produce high quality crops and staple food in order to curb dependence on water, fertilizers and pesticides. Most scientific papers of the Centre are unavailable mainly and are published as a list, which is probably due to certain secrecy of these studies.

2) **Asbar Centre for Studies, Research and Information (Asbar)** was founded in Saudi Arabia in 1994 and is engaged in social, economic and strategic research, as well as sociological surveys. Asbar publishes *Asbar Council: Monthly Report* in Arabic [3] and a number of annual publications in English, including *Report Saudi Water And Food Security: Issues And Strategies:* and *Asbar Council – King Salman Humanitarian Aid And Relief Centre*, which addresses issues of humanitarian assistance to countries and regions in need. [1] The staff of the organization consists of over a hundred local experts. The Centre publishes a monthly report on the most important political, social and intellectual issues.

3) **King Faisal Centre for Research and Islamic Studies (KFCRIS)** was founded in 1983. KFCRIS is as a scientific and educational platform for local, regional and global research in social sciences and humanities. For this purpose, the Centre invites top scientists from various countries on a regular basis. The Centre publishes a lot of periodicals, books and analytical notes, including *The Journal of Linguistic Studies* on the study of the Arabic language; the *Al-Faisal* magazine in Arabic; and *International Journal of Humanitarian Studies*. The staff consists of approximately forty people, mostly citizens of Saudi Arabia educated in the US.

4) **King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Centre (KAPSARC)** is a global energy economy and sustainable development think tank that service organizations and authorities in the Saudi Arabian energy sector. The staff employs approximately seventy experts, both local and foreign specialists.

Most of the local experts were educated at universities in the US and Europe. The organization publishes extensively: periodicals (*KAPSARC Journal Article, Instant Insight, KAPSARC Oil Market Outlook*); monographs, research and analytical reviews, etc. [11] The Centre focuses on such spheres as evaluation of public investment projects; prospects for transport development and fuel demand; regional energy markets; climate change policy; prospects for the development of global oil and natural gas markets; productivity and economic diversification; economic vulnerabilities of the energy sector. Despite being headed by the Minister of Energy of Saudi Arabian, KAPSARC does not pose itself as an organization affiliated with the government. The Centre's budget is based on donations, which guaranties non-interference from the state. The research programme of the think tank is also drawn up by the leadership of KAPSARC and is not influenced by the government [4, p. 23].

5) **King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST)** develops programmes that support the national research and innovation system, including trainings and research funding in various fields of science. The activities of the analytical centre are reflected in the annual reports [14] and in the news section on KACST's official website. The think tank employs 129 experts.

6) **Gulf Cooperation Council Interconnection Authority** is a joint stock company established in 2001 by the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. The organization deals with energy security and economic development. The activities of the organization are reflected in the annual reports, as well as in the *GCC Grid* periodical [12].

7) **Gulf Research Centre (GRC)** founded by Saudi businessman A. Sager in Dubai in 2000 was later registered in Geneva so that it would be regulated under Swiss NGO laws that require certain management parameters. The GRC leadership believes that this makes the activities of the analytical centre more credible and transparent for its benefactors. The international GRC team of 34 experts studies international

relations, economic development, defence and security issues, as well as environmental issues. Region of the research includes the GCC countries, as well as Iran, Iraq and Yemen. The Centre's numerous works are included in *The Gulf Yearbook*, as well as published as monographs and articles [13]. The organization cooperates with leading research centres in Europe and Asia, and holds international events, such as conferences and round tables.

8) **Rasanah: International Institute for Iranian Studies** analyzes domestic and foreign policy of Iran. The staff consists of 41 Saudi experts. Rasanah's publications include the monthly *Rasanah Issues Iran Case File* [8], the *Annual Strategic Reports*, books such as *Iran's Software Piracy and Digital Militias: Its Threats and Unannounced War Against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (2019) and *Military Institution in Iran Between Revolution and Statehood* (2017), and numerous articles [2].

9) **King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST)** is a world-class science and technology research university. It is headed by T. Chen, ex-chancellor of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST). The organization studies advanced membranes and porous materials; conducts oil engineering studies; explores agriculture in desert conditions; researches cyber security, etc. The works of university scientists are entered into such databases of scientific literature as *Elsevier Scopus Database* and *ISI Web of Knowledge*. The activities of the university are regularly published in *KAUST Insight* [5], *KAUST Discovery* [6] and other periodicals.

10) **King Abdullah Institute for Research and Consulting Studies (KAI)** is one of the thought factories of Saudi Arabia. KAI was established in 1996 as a consulting and research centre in the field of finance and economics, business analytics, legal business relations, etc. KAI management consists of the residents of Saudi Arabia. There is no available information on the number of experts working at the Institute or any publications.

11) **Sustainable Energy Technologies Centre (SET)** is an analytical centre focused on the development of sustainable

energy technologies, dealing with almost all types of renewable energy sources. The staff is largely represented by local experts and totals of 27 people. SET publishes papers on such projects as the innovative Fresnel collector with a polar solar tracking system for solar-driven polygeneration (electricity and water); development of new solar water heating systems; and boosting the performance of solar photovoltaic (PV) generators. The Centre mainly researches electrical materials; synthetic energy systems; solar photovoltaic systems; hydrogen technologies; nanomaterials; and energy conversion and storage.

12) **King Abdullah City for Atomic and Renewable Energy (KACARE)** is one of the Saudi Arabian think tanks implementing the state policy in the field of development of nuclear energy and renewable energy sources. Also, KACARE supports joint research projects between Saudi Arabia and international academic institutions in order to remain on cutting edge of scientific developments in nuclear power and renewable energy technologies. In 2017, KACARE launched the Saudi National Atomic Energy Project (SNAEP), which consists of four components: Large Nuclear Power Plant (LNPP); Small Module Reactor; Nuclear Fuel Cycle; and Nuclear and Radiological Regulatory Commission

13) **King Salman Centre for Local Governance (KSCLG)** is analytical centre of Saudi Arabia that specializes in the functioning of local government. The centre studies the activities of *muhafazah* (governorates), district, municipal and local councils. The research team consists of nine people, mostly not citizens of Saudi Arabia. KSCLG regularly publishes the *Handbook for Municipal Councilors in Saudi Arabia*, various papers, analytical reviews, etc. [7]

14) **Prince Sultan Institute for Environmental, Water and Desert Research of King Saud University** was founded in 1986 for the purpose of developing and conducting scientific research related to assimilation of deserts and combating desertification in the Arabian Peninsula. The Institute bi-annually publishes the *International Journal of Water Resources and Arid Environments*.

In addition, the organization publishes collective monographs in Arabic on subjects under study.

15) **King Abdullah Institute for Nanotechnology (KAIN)** is one of the top think tanks in Saudi Arabia involved in nanoscience and technology (since 2007). The institute employs 27 researchers; some of them invited experts from various countries. KAIN has high publication activity, judging by the number of articles, which numbered over 90 in 2019 [9]. Overall, KAIN holds 39 patents in the field of nanotechnology.

16) **Naif Arab University for Security Sciences (NAUSS)** was founded by the Arab Interior Ministers Council in Riyadh in 1985. It is the leading centre of the Arab world in the field of studying different aspects of security. In the context of safety research, NAUSS identifies four priority directions: cyber security, environmental security, terrorist threats and combating drug trafficking. NAUSS publishes a number of annual periodicals: *Journal of Information Security and Cybercrimes Research*, *Arab Journal for Security Studies*, and *Arab Journal of Forensic Sciences and Forensic Medicine* [10].

Conclusion

In conclusion, think tanks in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia make up the most numerous and qualitatively vital stratum of thought factories, now represented by different kinds of organizations: with different structures and forms of management; with diverse staff of experts that vary in numbers, nationality and citizenship; with different types of financing, either through state support or through sponsorship by private individuals and legal entities. Despite the fact that experts maintain that the structures described above have zero influence on state policy, we can confidently state that they play an important role in the development of the state's scientific and analytical potential, since they comprise large expert groups

represented by university and academic circles, as well as various local, regional and international experts.

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